

# California companies prime targets for Potter

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Bob Potter doesn't like to waste bullets. That's why the recruiting ace for the Inland Northwest Economic Alliance (INEA) targets California companies.

"I'm a lazy salesman," he said with a laugh. "I want to go where the best chance is."

The INEA is a consortium of nine economic development organizations in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho that works collectively to recruit, retain and expand businesses within a 13-county region surrounding Spokane. Since joining the INEA three years ago, Potter has completed 18 sales missions to California — and zero to Western Washington.

"I wouldn't even think of recruiting in Seattle," he said.

Potter is not being polite. Nor does he think Seattle lacks prospects that might prefer the Inland Northwest. He just believes he can make a stronger business case for a company to move from California than he can from Western Washington.

It helps that Potter knows the territory after spending many years working in California for AT&T as a sales executive. Plus he still owns a home in Pasadena, which provides a convenient base of operations. The bottom line, though, remains the strength of the



Potter

Inland Northwest's business case. The cost of doing business in California — everything from land to taxes to electrical rates to worker's compensation — is significantly higher, said Potter.

Potter's track record speaks for itself. Before joining INEA, he spent 15 years as president of Jobs Plus, an economic development organization serving greater Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. During that time, he recruited 71 companies to the region, all but a handful from California.

While Potter has yet to add to that total since joining INEA, he has made 160 individual sales calls and compiled a portfolio of more than 30 prospects. Since the recruitment process typically takes two or three years to bear fruit, Potter is not surprised he's still waiting to announce his first INEA deal. That should happen very soon,

though, with three or four more deals to follow, he said.

Because the INEA consists of nine different organizations serving 13 counties, Potter tries to recruit companies that could potentially fit in more than one community. He meets regularly with the INEA's members to go over his portfolio of prospects, but ultimately it's up to each member to close the deal.

Part of the INEA's purpose is to help members look at the recruiting process more regionally, said Potter. Recently, Greater Spokane Inc. and Jobs Plus went head to head, but instead of "bad-mouthing" each other — which could backfire and lead a prospect to spurn the region entirely — they worked well together and a deal should be announced soon, he said.

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